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SUBJECT: WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION EUROPEAN HEALTH MINISTERS MEET IN  
TALLINN

¶1. On June 25-27, Estonia hosted the World Health Organization (WHO) European Ministerial Conference on health systems in Tallinn. This was the largest high-level event Estonia has ever hosted. Health ministers, other senior health officials and finance ministers from 53 countries participated. The goal of the conference was to move health systems higher on the political agenda of European member states and discuss the linkage between economic growth and health sector development. WHO Director General Margaret Chan (the first WHO DG ever to visit Estonia), EU Health Commissioner Androula Vassiliou, President of the European Investment Bank Philippe Maystadt, WHO Regional Director for Europe Marc Danzon and Estonian Prime Minister (PM) Andrus Ansip all spoke at the conference.

¶2. Prime Minister Ansip's remarks marked the first time in his 3-year tenure as Prime Minister that he has made a national address devoted to health issues. He highlighted the growing challenge that financial sustainability of health systems presents for Europe. He also stressed European Governments' common goals of promoting healthy lifestyles, effectively managing health systems, securing quality health care and increasing the use of e-services in the health sector. Ansip underlined the importance of raising awareness about healthy life styles as a preventative measure. "Each kroon invested in healthy lifestyles will save thousands of kroons spent on medicine in the future," he concluded.

¶4. The Prime Minister's remarks closely echoed the principle themes of the WHO European Health Systems Charter (the "Tallinn Charter"), adopted by member states at the conference. The Tallinn Charter committed member states to invest in health systems; promote transparency; engage stakeholders in policy development and implementation; foster cross-country cooperation and ensure that national health systems are prepared to respond to crises. While acknowledging that the problems and facilities in each country are different, the Charter focuses on common values and goals: solidarity, equity and participation.

¶5. Comment: Hosting the WHO Conference gave Estonia an opportunity to raise its profile within the international community. However, we were disappointed that PM Ansip did not use this platform to highlight Estonia's HIV challenges and successes. While Estonia has the highest HIV/AIDs growth rate in Europe, the local NGO network was recently recognized by UNAIDS for its innovative and sustainable approach. The issue of HIV did come up during the meeting between the Prime Minister and WHO Director General Chan, which received wide coverage in local media. DG Chan praised Estonia's efforts in dealing with tuberculosis and HIV and encouraged the GOE to concentrate on the problem of HIV co-infection. End Comment.

Decker